

February 23, 2022

**Testimony Regarding HB 5037 - Dental Reimbursement Rates**  
**Robert W. Zavoski, MD, MPH**

Senators Kushner, Cicarella, Osten, Hartley, and Miner, Representatives Abercrombie, Betts, Walker, Dathan, Nolan, and France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

I write today in support of increases to Medicaid dental rates included in Governor Lamont's budget proposal. I offer this testimony as the former Medical Director of the Department of Social Services (DSS), the former Chief Medical Officer of two community health centers in Connecticut, as a practicing pediatrician, and as a taxpayer in Connecticut.

Under my tenure at DSS, our self-insured model of payment demonstrated beyond any doubt that investment in primary and preventive care saves the state money. No other state Medicaid Program had a comparable record of fiscal savings, improvements in outcomes and quality of care, and both member and provider satisfaction. Not one.

As time goes on, research shows that carving off organ systems for lesser payment rates and lesser access to preventive care damages the entire body and worsens other chronic diseases not generally associated with that part of the body. This Assembly session is struggling with the results of decades of not giving behavioral health the attention it needs relative to medical health.

The mouth is no different.

Improperly treated or ignored dental disease adversely impacts every other part of the body, from worsening coronary artery disease, to preventing proper control of diabetes, to negatively impacting pregnancy outcomes for both the mother and her baby. Connecticut can no longer afford to provide adequate access to dental services for adults covered under HUSKY.

Two years after leaving state service, I can still hear the arguments from the Office of Policy and Management. "We can afford the cost of this line item" as they entirely miss the impact of one line on so many of the other budget lines. Blocking adult access to dental services increases many other budget lines, such medical costs in uncontrolled diabetes, heart disease and in the case of pregnancies, in budget lines for generations to come. Further, lousy dental rates diverts care to more expensive settings, such as hospital emergency departments and FQHCs, increasing these budget lines.

Forcing Medicaid recipients to live with dental pain and loss of their teeth is also cruel Connecticut is better than this.

**In order to increase provider participation in Medicaid, adult dental reimbursement rates should be increased to parity with the child rates.**

As a former Medical Medical Director, as an experienced community health care administrator, as a practicing clinician, and as a taxpayer, I urge you to increase the adult Medicaid reimbursement rates to bring them to parity with the child Medicaid rates. This will allow family dental practices to accept Medicaid patients of all ages, expanding the network and improving access to care.

Thank you for your kind attention

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